

In 2022 Polls, Views on U.S. Relations On Par with Other World Powers in the Middle East

by [Frances McDonough \(/experts/frances-mcdonough\)](#)

Nov 9, 2022

Also available in

[العربية \(/ar/policy-analysis/asttlaat-alray-lam-2022-td-alwlayat-almthdt-wqwy-alalm-alakhry-fy-almrtbt-ynha-mn\)](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

[Frances McDonough \(/experts/frances-mcdonough\)](#)

Frances McDonough is a research assistant for the Fikra Forum at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.



Brief Analysis

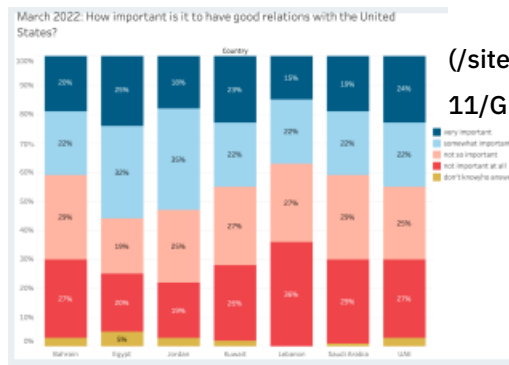
Regional polls from March and August reveal shifting power dynamics, as economic conditions and relations with Israel continue to weigh on citizens' minds.

In the two rounds of 2022 public opinion polling commissioned by the Washington Institute and conducted by a regional commercial survey firm across seven countries—Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE—popular support for relations with the United States remained relatively stable while the importance of relations with other world powers such as Russia and China increased.

Although the majority of Arab publics polled strongly opposed Russian military actions in Ukraine in both March—in the direct aftermath of the invasion—and again in August after several months of war, more citizens in Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE appear to value relations with Russia by August. Support for relations with China showed a similar jump in countries like Egypt and Bahrain, while U.S. involvement in the region, including Biden's July visit and the two-year old Abraham Accords, garnered little approval.

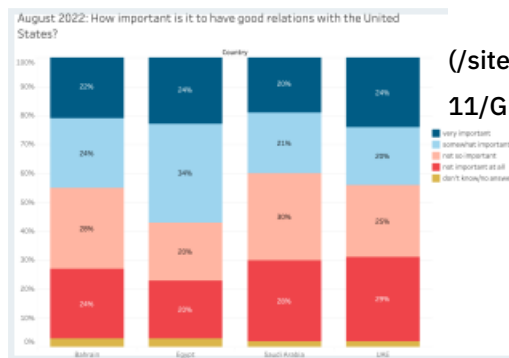
Regional Reliance on the United States is Waning, Views on Importance of Ties with the United States Remain Split

Of the seven countries polled in March 2022, even the strongest display of popular support for ties with the United States—57% in Egypt—was split, at best. Lebanon rated the importance of American ties lowest of all, with only 37% saying good relations with the United States were at least “somewhat important.” Not far ahead in their approval of the United States were Saudi citizens (41%) and Bahrainis (42%).



(/sites/default/files/2022-11/Graph%201.png)

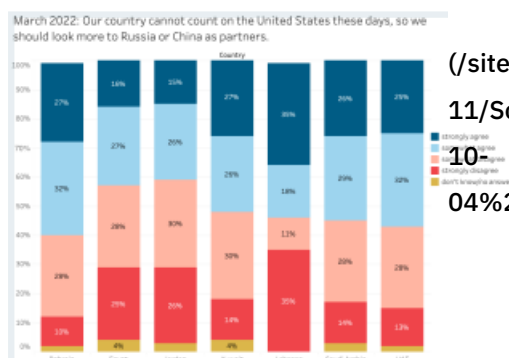
When asked the same question several months later, views in Bahrain warmed slightly, increasing four points to 46%. Nevertheless, the perceived importance of relations with the United States still remained split across the board. In fact, Saudi respondents were entirely unchanged in their opinions, with only 41% saying “somewhat” or “very important.” In the same poll, Saudi citizens ranked the highest among the four countries polled in their disapproval of President Joe Biden’s August visit to the region, with 70% saying the trip was “somewhat” or “very negative.”



(/sites/default/files/2022-11/Graph%202.png)

While regional opinions on U.S. relations remained average in March and August, reliance on the United States seems to be on the decline. In March, over half of respondents in Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE agreed at least “somewhat” with the following statement: “We cannot count on the United States these days, so we should look more to Russia and China as partners.”

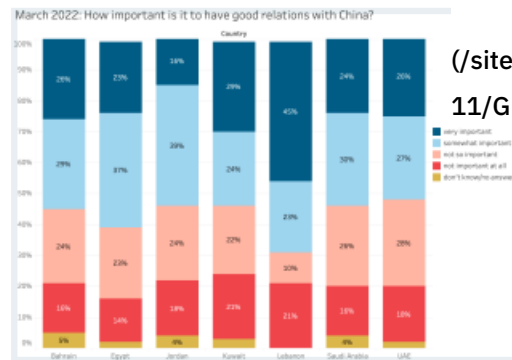
Moreover, more citizens in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE seemed to agree with this view when asked again only five months later. In August, polls in Saudi Arabia and Egypt showed a four-point increase in those who agreed with the pointed assertion.



(/sites/default/files/2022-11/Screen%20Shot%202022-10-04%20at%204.08.52%20PM.png)

As Economic Conditions Worsen, Support for China and Russia Grows

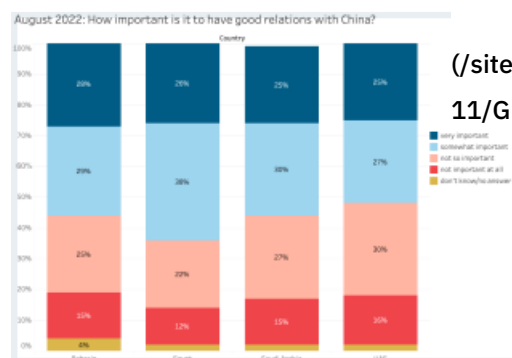
Reinforcing the idea that the Middle East is increasingly looking toward Russia and China as partners, 2022 polling showed that modest majorities in all seven countries valued “good relations with China” as either “somewhat” or “very important.” Notably, Lebanon showed the highest proportion of support for ties with China at 68% in March.



(/sites/default/files/2022-11/Graph%205.png)

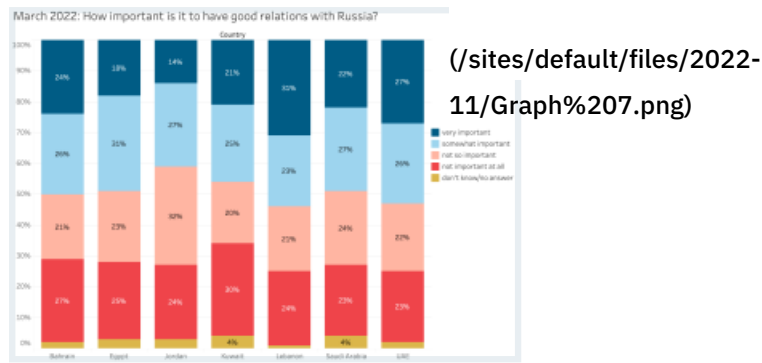
When asked to rate China again in August, citizens in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Egypt held steady. This valuing of ties—especially when compared to the percentages valuing ties with the United States—may reflect the deepening economic ties China has pursued in the region.

In Egypt, for instance, China **reaffirmed** (<https://www.silkroadbriefing.com/news/2022/06/20/china-links-belt-road-initiative-expenditure-to-egypts-2030-vision-development-plan/>) in June that it will “align” its Belt and Road Initiative with Egypt’s “Vision 2030” economic development strategy. In early August, China Petroleum and Chemical Corporation (Sinopec) **signed** (<https://www.aramco.com/en/news-media/news/2022/aramco-and-sinopec-sign-mou-to-collaborate-on-projects-in-saudi-arabia>) an energy agreement with Saudi Aramco in a similar effort to coordinate long term economic ties, with the Belt and Road Initiative and Saudi’s “Vision 2030” in mind.

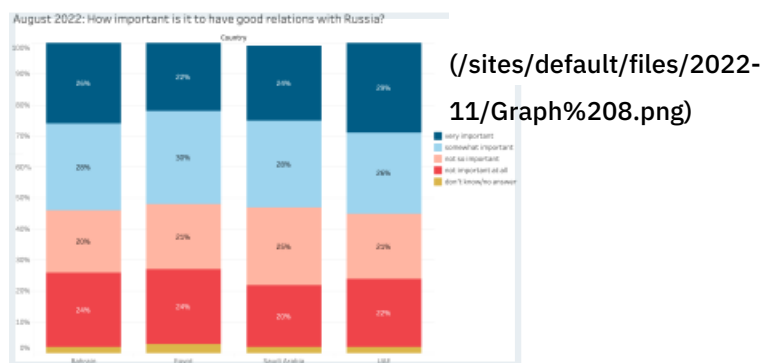


(/sites/default/files/2022-11/Graph%206.png)

Regarding the importance of good relations with Russia, opinions were more mixed. In March 2022, a similar proportion of respondents rated relations with Russia as important relative to the United States. In Jordan, only 41% viewed ties with Russia as at least “somewhat important,” but in Lebanon, 54% said the same. In five out of the seven countries polled in March—Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE—more respondents expressed that the importance of good relations with Russia was at least “somewhat important” compared those that said the same for the United States.



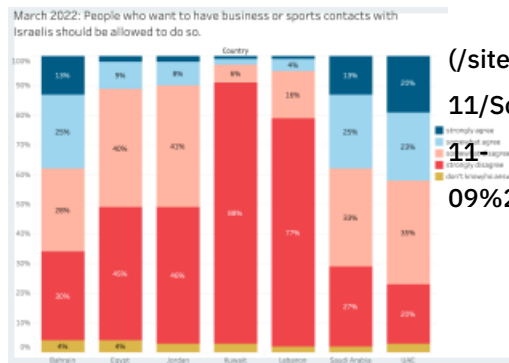
Just a few months later, the number of respondents who valued relations with Russia marginally increased—four points in Bahrain, three in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and two in the UAE, though the latter three come within the margin of error. The sustained support of about half of each country’s publics comes in spite of the disapproval expressed by the majority in both March and August polls of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.



Moreover, the majority in each country agreed in March and August that “the Russian military actions in Ukraine are to blame for the recent rise in food prices here.” These incongruent results emphasize that a lack of popularity for Russia’s military movements have done little to weaken the popular value of relations with Russia—an attitude likewise pursued by many of these countries’ governments.

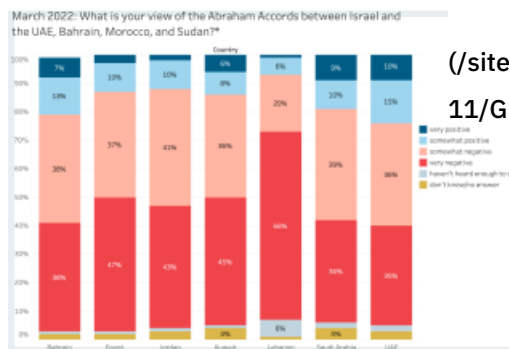
Relations with Israel Get Mixed Reviews

When given the statement “People who want to have business or sports contacts with Israelis should be allowed to do so,” nearly half of respondents in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE agreed at least “somewhat” in March. When compared to the large majority of respondents in Lebanon, Kuwait, Jordan, and Egypt who “somewhat” or “strongly” disagreed, these numbers stand out as noteworthy elements in the ongoing Arab-Israeli conversation. In August, the number of respondents in Saudi Arabia who at least “somewhat” agreed with the assertion actually increased four points, from 38% to 42%.



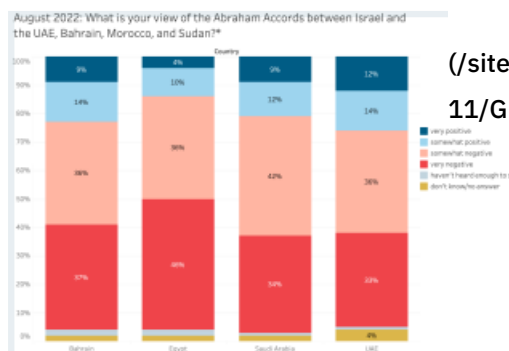
(/sites/default/files/2022-11/Screen%20Shot%202022-11-09%20at%2011.20.09%20AM.png)

However, citizens throughout the Middle East continued to express hesitance on the U.S.-led Abraham Accords, reinforcing mixed reviews on the United States as a whole. In March, overwhelming majorities in all seven countries said they viewed the accords as “somewhat negative” or “very negative.” Even in countries signed onto the accords—namely Bahrain and the UAE—support has dwindled from larger minorities in the initial period after the accords were signed.



(/sites/default/files/2022-11/Graph%2011.png)

Although the Emirates had the most respondents with a positive outlook in August on normalization with Israel—with Bahrain closely behind—this nevertheless represented only a quarter of respondents who viewed the accords as “somewhat” or “very positive.”



(/sites/default/files/2022-11/Graph%2012.png)

Methodological Note

These findings are from personal interview surveys, conducted in March and July/August 2022, among nationally representative samples of 1,000 citizens from each country, randomly selected according to standard geographic probability procedures. They were conducted by highly reputable and experienced independent, regional

commercial firms, with strict quality controls and assurances of confidentiality. The estimated statistical margin of error for samples of this size and nature is plus or minus 3 percentage points. Additional methodological information, including full questionnaire and data tables, is readily available on the new interactive polling data platform (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/twi-interactive-polling-platform>) on Fikra Forum. ❖

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[The Future of al-Jawhani's Pragmatism in Idlib and Afrin](#)

Nov 8, 2022

◆
Yilmaz Saeed

[\(/policy-analysis/future-al-jawlanis-pragmatism-idlib-and-afrin\)](#)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[The Formation of Iraq's New Government is a Major Victory for Iran and Its Allies](#)

Nov 8, 2022

◆
Nawzad Shukri

[\(/policy-analysis/formation-iraqs-new-government-major-victory-iran-and-its-allies\)](#)



USAID

BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Iran-backed militias demonize USAID after a U.S. citizen gunned down in Baghdad](#)

Nov 8, 2022

◆
Hamdi Malik,
Michael Knights

(/policy-analysis/iran-backed-militias-demonize-usaid-after-us-citizen-gunned-down-baghdad)

TOPICS

Arab & Islamic Politics (/policy-analysis/arab-islamic-politics)

Arab-Israeli Relations (/policy-analysis/arab-israeli-relations)

Energy & Economics (/policy-analysis/energy-economics)

Great Power Competition (/policy-analysis/great-power-competition)

U.S. Policy (/policy-analysis/us-policy)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Egypt (/policy-analysis/egypt)

Gulf States (/policy-analysis/gulf-states)

Israel (/policy-analysis/israel)

Jordan (/policy-analysis/jordan)

Lebanon (/policy-analysis/lebanon)

Middle East (/policy-analysis/middle-east)